

By Ingrid Ostby

A Better Career

Gaining the right skills to land the right job

Martha Ouellette, CPIM, is global supply chain planning director at Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, where she is responsible for the forecasting and planning of Fender electric guitars manufactured worldwide. Previously, she had spent several years as a production planner for the U.S. Air Force and held a position as director of operations for MD Helicopters.

“[MD Helicopters] was struggling financially,” Ouellette admits. The business had accrued millions of dollars in past-due back orders, some as old as 10 years. Using sales and operations planning, Ouellette and her team helped the purchasing group level out incoming raw material orders and reduce raw material inventory levels. “We slowed down the cash payout for raw material and increased revenue, [as] we could now focus on building exactly what we had orders for and maintain a predictable output of finished goods,” she says. “The APICS body of knowledge helped explain to everyone involved how applying these techniques would be beneficial to the organization.”

Ouellette also soon realized how each function within an organization relates to another. “As an organization, we needed to choose a target service level. Do we want to have everything we sell on the shelf now or within three days?” Ouellette asks. Customer service wanted at least one of everything on the shelves at all times, while purchasing and finance hesitated because of the cost.

“The company as a whole needed to make decisions and set goals [to] drive strategy for the rest of the organization,” she says. “Their goals must work in unison to achieve the company goal.” Using APICS principles, Ouellette was able to better explain the interrelationships of these objectives

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and bring executives to an understanding about their importance.

Time for change

Despite her operations successes, Ouellette says she could foresee layoffs and pay reductions at the company. “Each day, I wondered if I should be looking for another job.” She would search for positions—many of which required an APICS certification—then convince herself not to apply. “[When] you get to know your boss, your coworkers, and the atmosphere [in which you work], why would you want to start all over again? If you are comfortable where you are, why change?” Ouellette asks.

Nevertheless, she decided to attend a professional development meeting to meet industry colleagues who could help her “see the path to success in the industry,” she says. “The guest speaker used the phrase, ‘Comfort never produced greatness.’ He was right. Why was I settling? Making a change does not have to mean a life-changing event. It can start small.” She decided



Martha Ouellette, CPIM

Global supply chain planning director

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation

to earn her Certified in Production and Inventory Management designation.

“I believe that certification helps you be recognized for your abilities in addition to your years of experience in the industry,” Ouellette says. She now is considering earning the Certified Supply Chain Professional and eventually the Certified Fellow in Production and Inventory Management designations.

Moving forward

Once Ouellette was certified, she gained a better understanding of what she wanted from her career and how to achieve it. “I wrote my résumé, created my portfolio, [and] chose to step out of my comfort zone,” she says. “I now have the job of my dreams.”

In addition to working at Fender for the past seven months, Ouellette serves as vice president of membership for the APICS Phoenix Chapter. “APICS helped build my confidence [and] showed me that there is a path to a brighter future where you are recognized for your knowledge,” she says. “APICS [members have] taught me that there truly are employers who value people who want to make a difference in their profession.”

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